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U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, May 18, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "FLOOD-DAMAGED FOOD AND DRUGS." Information from the Food and Drug Administration, United States Department of Agriculture.

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I've just found out what becomes of all the apples and oranges, lettuce and spinach, canned goods, sacks of flour, jars of mayonnaise and peanut butter that are submerged in the polluted waters of a serious flood. Our correspondent with the Food and Drug Administration tells the story in today's report.

Quoting directly: "The terrible floods in the eastern part of the United States this spring damaged hundreds of tons of foodstuffs stored in warehouses, railroad cars, grocery stores, and private homes. And everywhere officials -- local, State, and federal -- were right on the job, to see that all food dangerous to health was destroyed before it could be distributed to consumers.

"Inspectors from the Food and Drug Administration cooperated with local and State authorities and the sanitary engineers detailed by the Public Health Service in doing everything possible to prevent the distribution of polluted foods.

"Long before the roads were passable, the Director of Public Health in Pittsburgh telephoned the Food and Drug Administration in Washington, asking what to do about 300 carloads of produce which had been submerged in the flood waters. He wanted to know what types of food could safely be released, and what types must be destroyed immediately to protect public health. This was only one of the problems that faced the hard-pressed local officials in the stricken cities.

"I've just been talking with one of the federal Food and Drug men who worked in the flooded areas," writes our correspondent. "On the whole, he says, there was splendid cooperation among retailers, wholesalers, and the railroads in destroying damaged foods. State militia and National Guardsmen also helped in the disposal of polluted goods. At Pittsburgh, where many carloads of food were ruined, huge amounts of contaminated products were buried in a pit, in the railroad yards. Shippers of large carload lots were naturally eager to salvage all they could, but wherever the cars had been completely submerged, authorities embargoed all the foodstuffs.

"Local officials in 22 cities have reported the destruction of a total of 390 tons of fresh fruits and vegetables, coffee, tea, candy, cereals, flour, beans, dessert preparations, meats, shortening, butter, dried fruits and nuts, spices, and drugs. This figure does not, of course, take into consideration



hundreds of small lots and badly mixed stocks. In Pittsburgh, for example, where the damage was enormous, officials made no attempt whatever to tally condemned foodstuffs.

"To date, actions under the federal law against flood-damaged foods have included the following seizures: 580,000 pounds of sacked feeds, 25 tons of corn, 200 bags of unroasted coffee, 11,410 pounds of butter, one shipment of candy, and 10,500 pounds of cheese.

"An enterprising dealer of Lowell, Massachusetts, tried to take advantage of the flood situation by re-selling damaged goods. He bought up ten cars of badly soaked stock feed, and signed an agreement to sell it for fertilizer only, paying around \$6.00 a ton for the grain that originally sold around \$2.00 a sack. Officials put a stop to his lucrative but unethical business when they found the dealer drying out the grain, sifting out the mold and dirt, and selling the product again at stock-feed prices.

"Now, in order to show you how food inspectors deal with flood-damaged foods, let's divide the foods into four main types. First, the dry products -- grain, flour, coffee, nuts -- all the dry products you might buy in sacks or cardboard containers. Foods of this type that had been water-soaked were destroyed immediately -- some were burned, and some were buried. Officials took no chances with these foods because bacteriological tests showed positive evidence that the flood waters were heavily polluted with germ life that might lead to disease. A carload of walnuts was among the "dry-food" casualties in a Pittsburgh warehouse. The shippers telephoned to see whether the nuts could be assorted, and part of them saved, but food officials had already inspected the lot and found that 93 percent of the nuts had water in the shells.

"Next, raw fruits and vegetables. Vegetables like celery, lettuce, leeks, and cabbage, which are eaten raw, cannot usually be salvaged if they have become contaminated. Fruits, such as apples, oranges, lemons, grapefruit, bananas -- all the fruits that could be peeled, or sufficiently boiled before eating, were salvaged by proper washing in a disinfectant.

"Next, foods in tin cans. As a general thing, although the cans were completely submerged, the only damage done was to the labels, which floated off into the water. The cans were washed with a chlorine solution, rinsed in clear water, and dried quickly before they had a chance to rust. Many cases of canned goods were held up, after the disinfecting process, so that the packers might send new labels. I hope they'll get the right labels on the right cans," says our correspondent. "It might prove confusing to buy a can labeled baked beans, for instance, and find out when you got home that you'd bought a can of crushed pineapple.

"The fourth type of food products surveyed by food inspectors were those in jars with screw tops -- mayonnaise, peanut butter, chocolate malted milks, preserves, and so on. These jars are neither air-tight nor water-tight. Whenever there was the least evidence that the jars had been in polluted water, which of course would seep through the tops, authorities ordered the products destroyed.

"Drug products, too, were pretty badly soaked. Many of the retailers made arrangements with the manufacturers whereby the damaged goods were returned," concludes today's report from the Food and Drug Administration.

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